

America Requires a Real Foreign Policy Debate

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The collapse of the Soviet Union freed the world of a horrid tyranny and global menace. However, it also unleashed an orgy of hubris in Washington. Convinced that America won—with little consideration of the contribution of the USSR's Mikhail Gorbachev, who kept the Red Army in its barracks—members of America's foreign policy elite viewed Moscow's collapse as only the first step. They considered themselves custodians of the globe's unipower, with the mandate of heaven to remake the entire world, regardless of the cost to Americans and other peoples.

The first Gulf War reinforced Washington's illusion of omnipotence. "What we say goes," intoned President George H.W. Bush, acting as the proverbial master of the universe. Alas, Uncle Sam's arrogance only grew. The Clinton administration's secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, declared: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America: We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us."

At the time her comment looked like comedic bluster, what you would expect from a wannabe *generalissima* who had been denied the presumed pleasure of sending masses of people into battle to their deaths. But in three short years, the endless wars initiated by President George W. Bush in response to 9/11 turned the outburst into deadly policy. Two decades later who on earth, other than an Albright-wannabe, could believe that American policymakers see further into the future?

Unfortunately, this unbridled hubris, which suffuses those who command the world's most powerful military, has had catastrophic results. In the world imagined by members of the blob, Ben Rhodes's inelegant label for the foreign policy establishment, U.S. policymakers are entitled, indeed, required to kill and destroy to create a better world.

Again, Albright led the way. As she infamously asked Colin Powell: "What's the use of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?" It evidently didn't occur to her that the lives of military personnel, few of whom joined to be gambit pawns in her global chess game, deserved consideration. Perhaps even worse was her answer to the question of whether the deaths of half a million Iraqi children from U.N. sanctions were worth the price. Of course, she insisted: "We think the price is worth it." Yes, American policymakers, anointed by God, or whatever is the modern, secular equivalent, are entitled to decide who lives and dies

halfway around the globe. Indeed, these otherwise unimportant foreigners presumably should feel honored to die in Washington's service.

What else to make of the invasion of Iraq, based on a lie, that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis? What about two decades of war in Afghanistan, which turned the countryside into a rural abattoir? How else to defend aiding the overthrow of Libya's dictator, while ignoring the decade of intermittent warfare that followed? Even more grotesque was helping Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed "Slice 'n Dice" bin Salman impoverish, starve, and kill hundreds of thousands of Yemenis. Current U.S. policy is to punish the suffering masses in Syria and Venezuela, since nothing else has succeeded in overthrowing the dictators who, unlike the Saudi crown prince, Washington dislikes. As Madeleine Albright explained, we think the price is "worth it"—at least when others bear the cost.

Despite its endless failures of late, Washington never changes. True, President Donald Trump made some effort to challenge the status quo, but he allowed the generals to beat him into submission when it came to questioning the NATO alliance and South Korean "mutual" defense treaty. He was equally weak in overcoming resistance to withdrawing from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq.

Now the Biden administration is moving in the opposite direction. After criticizing the murderous Saudi tyranny, President Joe Biden submissively begged Riyadh to increase oil production—only to be dramatically snubbed. Yet he apparently is pressing the Kingdom to allow American military personnel to act as bodyguards for the licentious, dissolute royals. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put unusual pressure on the Europeans to do more in defense, but the administration has rushed more troops to the continent, even calling up reserves, and spent far more money than the Europeans to aid Kiev. Today the United Kingdom, one of the most hawkish European governments, is reducing the size of its army because, well, it can with America on station. Biden is begging the South Korean government to let Americans risk nuclear strikes on their homeland in order to defend Seoul.

All these policies put the interests of foreign governments before those of the American people.

Recognizing that Washington's duty is first and foremost to this nation does not mean a policy of "isolationism," as crudely caricatured by critics. Trade, investment, immigration, and travel all offer enormous benefits to Americans. The U.S. should be a commercial and cultural giant.

Today's members of the blob, however, evince little concern for those to whom they are supposedly responsible, instead designing policies that serve foreign interests and the latter's domestic allies. Businesses back foreign aid, think tanks crave foreign attention, bankers want foreign deals, arms makers need foreign wars, lobbyists serve foreign clients. While gorging themselves through their Washington influence, they gird themselves in sanctimony. Yes, Uncle Sam may be enriching them while sacrificing the interests of the American people, but it really is for the good of humanity, just trust them!

The Democratic Party, which once worried about the ferocity of the Cold War, battled President Richard Nixon over Vietnam, and fueled protests against Dubya's disastrous misadventure in Iraq, has taken the lead in waging a proxy war against Russia and matching GOP hostility toward China. Although Republicans have become more skeptical of global social engineering, the GOP leadership in Washington is even more militaristic and belligerent than the Democratic Party. The bipartisan War Party has been busy campaigning for conflict with Russia, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, North Korea, Venezuela, and China. Now Mexico also is on their list. For such dubious crusades they have sacrificed American lives and wealth—and are prepared to do so again and again.

The American people can no longer afford to leave decisions over war and peace to the president. They should insist that Congress fulfill its constitutional role in voting whether to declare war, which allows them to make their voices known on Capitol Hill. Indeed, they are the last, best bulwark for peace. For instance, when President Barack Obama tossed to Congress the question of bombing Syria over its alleged use of chemical weapons, the American people resoundingly told legislators no.

More fundamentally, Americans should insist that all policymakers treat war as a last resort, rather than just another policy tool. Today, Albright acolytes think nothing about losing death and destruction on a massive scale for essentially frivolous reasons. To answer her question, what's the use of having the nation's superb military? To meet existential threats and protect vital interests, not remake the globe in the image desired by the arrogant elite filling America's imperial city. The nation's founders recognized the seriousness of war, not only to combatants but to civilians and domestic institutions. That is why the constitutional scheme was designed to discourage war.

Resisting the military temptation is even more important when facing significant military powers. Analysts who didn't expect Vladimir Putin to invade Ukraine insist that he would never use nuclear weapons, no matter how hot our involvement in the ongoing proxy war might become. The same people claim that China can be deterred from attacking Taiwan by simply warning the former off, with nary a thought as to how hard it would be to prevent a serious conventional clash from escalating. And the same people propose doing more of the same with North Korea, even as it expands its nuclear arsenal and builds ICBMs capable of targeting America.

What could possibly go wrong in any of these cases? Nothing, insists the War Party.

Americans tend not to vote on foreign policy. The issues seem so far away. No longer. Thousands of Americans died and tens of thousands were wounded, many grievously, as a result of Washington's bloody hubris. With the U.S. moving to confront China and Russia simultaneously, the future could prove far more dangerous, even disastrous.

Donald Trump offered a glimpse of how a tough-minded but better-prepared president could reorient U.S. policy back to a focus on the American people. The blob's shock at his election was enormous and salutary. Today those benefiting from Washington's imperial policies, both domestic and foreign, tremble at the thought that Trump might return.

Although repeating the past is no solution, a more serious leader with a policy that truly placed America first could break today's coalition of warmongers, social engineers, and political profiteers. It is time to design a foreign policy as if the American people mattered.

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